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SUBJECT: PAPUAN REGION PREPARES FOR UPCOMING ELECTIONS

REF: A. JAKARTA 271

[1](#)B. JAKARTA 77 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Indonesia's eastern provinces of Papua and West Papua are gearing up for the national legislative elections on April 9. While the situation has been calm and is expected to remain largely peaceful, long-standing Papuan resentment over perceived political marginalization lurks beneath the surface. Disputes have arisen, for example, over the voter registration of migrants. Soundings indicate that secular-oriented parties like Golkar remain strong in the region. In line with national polls, President Yudhoyono's Partai Demokrat looks poised to gain ground. Mission plans to send election observers to the region. END SUMMARY.

THE CAMPAIGN IN PAPUA

[1](#)2. (C) The Papuan region of eastern Indonesia is gearing up for the upcoming elections. (Note: National legislative elections take place on April 9 and presidential elections in July.) Despite being home to only one percent of Indonesia's population, Papua's gold, copper, natural gas, timber and other commodities give the region importance. All the major parties are making a play for the region's voters in a lively campaign. As in much of the rest of Indonesia, bread and butter issues like jobs, rising prices and corruption, dominate the campaign.

[1](#)3. (C) Papua's history has interjected some unique issues into the region's politics. Many ethnic Papuans--1.5 million out of the region's 2.5 million total population--believe that the GOI took control of the region without giving local people a say. (Note: Indonesia incorporated Papua, a former Dutch colony, in 1969 following a UN-supervised vote by GOI-selected Papuan leaders.) Papuans also remain angry about the region's persistent underdevelopment despite its natural resource wealth. Relations between ethnic Papuans and the largely Muslim migrants from other parts of Indonesia are another source of tension.

A MAJOR LOGISTICAL CHALLENGE

[1](#)4. (C) Papua's expansive and remote terrain presents enormous logistical challenges for the upcoming elections. (Note: Papua and West Papua provinces account for over a quarter of Indonesia's land mass, including its highest mountains.) Many ethnic Papuans live in remote villages reachable only by air or by long treks through dense jungle. Government administration remains underdeveloped in these areas. As a result, the Indonesian military (TNI) will likely play a major role distributing ballot boxes and handling other logistical matters. Human rights groups in the region have criticized this arrangement given military involvement in past human rights violations in the region. The GOI asserts that the security forces are only assisting in a key government-related task and have been warned repeatedly not to take sides during the election.

¶15. (C) Preparations for the elections are moving forward. The regional election commission (KPUD) has conducted a number of election-day rehearsals, particularly in the highland regions. Officials have moved additional police and military personnel into the region to deal with any potential problems (and to assist with election preparations). So far, they have kept a relatively low profile.

¶16. (C) One potential source of trouble are controversies over voter registration in Mimika district. This region, which is home to U.S.-based Freeport-McMoRan's giant Grasberg copper and gold mine, has attracted migrants from other parts of Papua and from across Indonesia. Some of these migrants have obtained legal residency in Mimika district while others have not. Already rumors are circulating that many migrants have obtained residency through bribing local officials. All this angers ethnic Papuans who feel their vote is being watered down.

PARTIES JOCKEY FOR ADVANTAGE

¶17. (C) Secular-oriented parties dominate in the region. Despite national poll numbers that are flat, Golkar, the party of Vice President Kalla, remains strong in Papua. Papua Governor Barnabas Suebu and many other provincial leaders are Golkar members and the party retains a formidable grass-roots network in the region.

¶18. (C) President Yudhoyono's Partai Demokrat (PD) looks set to make significant gains with both Papuans and migrants in the region. Much of PD's success stems from Yudhoyono's personal popularity and corruption free image. This got a boost in January, when the president visited Manokwari, the capital of West Papua province, to view earthquake relief operations and inaugurate new development projects. (Note: Manokwari and neighboring Sorong suffered a magnitude 7.6 earthquake on January 4, see ref b.) That said, PD still trails Golkar in building a grass-roots network.

¶19. (C) Prabowo Subianto's Gerindra party is also making strides in the region. (Note: Prabowo, a former member by marriage of the Suharto clan and a former general, is stigmatized by allegations of human rights violations during his time in the military.) Gerindra's well-funded strategy relies on slick television ads and an extensive billboard and poster campaign in Papua's major cities. The party lacks an effective grassroots network.

HOPES FOR A PEACEFUL ELECTION

¶10. (C) As reviewed in ref a, Indonesia's elections are expected to be largely peaceful. That said, if there are problems, they are expected to take place in such historically restive regions as Aceh and Papua. At this point, the situation seems calm in Papua. Our contacts warn, however, that there could be some small disruptions given the endemic tensions in the region. Activists could use the situation to drive home their anti-Jakarta views, for example, or security forces could come down too hard on some rallies, etc. The GOI appears aware of international concerns and seems intent on taking a largely hands off approach, while maintaining the ability to keep the peace as necessary. Mission plans to send election observers to the region.

HUME